

# A World Anew: The Latest Theories of Leadership

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THE REVOLUTION IN LEADERSHIP RESEARCH began with the emergence of the new paradigms described in the preceding chapter and has resulted in the application of new theories and approaches to understanding leadership. Accordingly, the new leadership theories reviewed in this chapter complement and build upon the major assumptions and research purposes of the social constructivist, critical, and postmodern paradigms. For example, complexity theory attempts to address postmodernism's questioning of the belief that leadership is or can be a predictable and generalized phenomenon (a conviction held by researchers operating from a functionalist paradigm). The emerging theories of leadership teams and cultural approaches to leadership respond to critical theorists' concerns about the gender and racial biases embedded in earlier leadership research. Social constructivists' views of leadership are reflected in organizational learning approaches in which mental models, interpretation, and cognitive mind-sets are key elements for understanding leadership. In addition, process theories reflect both postmodern and social constructivist calls for approaches to understanding leadership that are grounded in local conditions and take into account the complexity of meaning in social systems.

The new theories also reflect the changing context of leadership in a world where cultural and social differences are more prominent and where multiple, complex forces such as changing demographics, technology, faster decisions, and greater competition make straightforward and insular approaches to leadership problematic at best (Lipman-Blumen, 1996, 2000). As Peter Vaill (1991) noted, we no longer have simple problems with right or wrong answers

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but are increasingly faced with complex dilemmas. Perhaps the “truth” is that there never were simple solutions but that in working in a functionalist paradigm of authority, one-way power, and the status quo, leadership appeared simpler in earlier times and in traditional schools of thought. As we embrace other perspectives and interpretations, leadership may seem more complex when in reality, past researchers have simply ignored the complexity.

Because the new leadership theories described in this chapter were predominantly developed by researchers using social constructivist and critical paradigms, theory is often not an appropriate term for the research results. As noted in the previous chapter, the aim of functionalist research is building theory that predicts behavior or situations. For example, trait, contingency, and behavior theories seek to predict an outcome (leadership effectiveness) by studying certain traits and actions. In the social constructivist and critical paradigms, however, the goal of research is not to predict behavior; instead, it usually strives to improve understanding and description. As a result, a particular approach to leadership in these paradigms may not have the same type of empirical research support as in the functionalist paradigm. We use the word *theory* because it is most familiar to practitioners, but we acknowledge that much of the new research reviewed in this chapter would not fit that word in its strictest definition.

Given the breadth and density of scholarship on new leadership theories, the following organizational and conceptual roadmaps are offered as a guide for navigating this chapter. For each leadership theory and approach reviewed, we discuss (1) the definition of the theory, its emergence, and key scholars; (2) the theory’s major assumptions, contributions, and advantages; (3) key findings and insights from studies, if available; and (4) criticisms, problems, and issues that have emerged with the theory. Disparities in the volume and depth of information presented for each theory reflect differences in the extent to which scholars have adopted a particular theory or approach. Although this volume cannot synthesize all the scholarship in this vast new literature base, we highlight key texts and findings and provide a lengthy list of references so that the reader can continue developing a deeper understanding. In addition, key points are summarized at the end of each discussion of a theory to facilitate comparison across theories. Several vignettes about leadership are also

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included in this chapter to illustrate how to translate new leadership theories into administrative practice.

Most of the schools of thought reviewed in *Making Sense of Administrative Leadership: The “L” Word in Higher Education* (Bensimon, Neumann, and Birnbaum, 1989) continue to be researched and refined, even those considered less conceptually robust such as trait and behavior theories. These newer studies are not reviewed in this book, however, as there are few new insights to be gleaned (Kouzes and Posner, 2002; Kurke, 2004; Kyle, 1998; Olson, 1991; Rosenbach and Taylor, 2001). Studies do continue to demonstrate the importance of certain traits such as integrity to the leadership process, and studies that reaffirm key leadership insights are reviewed. We do, however, update contingency, cognitive, and cultural theories of leadership given the significance of new findings. One approach in the power and influence school of thought (transformational leadership) reviewed in the earlier book also needs to be updated, as it was just gaining visibility in the 1980s and research on it had just begun. Two new leadership theories reviewed in this chapter could not be placed easily in early schools of thought: complexity and team or relational theories. Complexity theories are very similar to learning theories and might be considered a cognitive approach. Team models emerged from feminist research and might be placed under the social and cultural school of thought. To highlight the distinctive insights and key findings associated with these two new leadership theories, however, we decided not to embed them in our discussion of existing leadership frameworks and instead present them independently.

Figure 2 illustrates the progression and changes that have occurred in the leadership literature before and after the revolution. Over the past twenty years, leadership has moved from being leader centered, individualistic, hierarchical, focused on universal characteristics, and emphasizing power over followers to a new vision in which leadership is processed centered, collective, context bound, nonhierarchical, and focused on mutual power and influence processes (also described by Rost [1991] as the postindustrial paradigm). Although most of the theories reviewed in this chapter reflect the newer vision of leadership depicted on the right side of the diagram, the arrows represent theoretical continuums, not rigid

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**FIGURE 2**  
**The Revolution in Leadership Research**

Then		Now
Search for universal leadership characteristics	→	Context bound
Examine power and hierarchy	→	Focus on mutual power and influence
Study individuals	→	Emphasis on the collective and the collaborative
Predict behavior and outcomes	→	Promote learning, empowerment, change
Leader centered	→	Process oriented

endpoints, underscoring the fact that each theory occupies a unique position on each of the five leadership dimensions. For example, transformational leadership theory shares most of the characteristics of older visions of leadership as it is leader centered, individualistic, hierarchical, and focused on universal characteristics. It differs from some of these earlier theories, however, by focusing on mutual power and influence processes. Given the fact that transformational leadership theory is situated on the bridge between traditional and contemporary approaches to understanding leadership, we begin by reviewing the new insights on transformational leadership.

## Transformational Leadership

### *Definition and Emergence*

Transformational leadership is typically defined as a power and influence theory in which the leader acts in mutual ways with the followers, appeals to their higher needs, and inspires and motivates followers to move toward a particular purpose (Bensimon, Neumann, and Birnbaum, 1989; Rost, 1991). Transformational leaders attend to the individual needs of followers and offer inspiration and motivation to organizations and their constituents by providing meaning to their work rather than just rewards. Intended to understand

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how organizations could be led most effectively, this power and influence approach eclipsed traditional notions of transactional leadership. Rather than continue to consider processes in which leaders exchange rewards or administer punishments for following (or not following) their wishes, leaders were relied on to guide followers in organizational processes. Burns (1978) is credited with developing the theory of transformational leadership in his *Leadership*, which many different researchers have elaborated on over the past fifteen years, including Bass (1985), Kouzes and Posner (2002), and Rost (1991). Burns used the word *transforming*, not transformational, but because most scholars use the word *transformational*, we use it throughout the section.

### ***Major Assumptions and Advantages***

A central component that defines transformational leadership is the role of ethics and morals (Burns, 1978). In a major contribution to the leadership literature, Burns explains the connection between leaders and moral purpose. In a review of significant leaders throughout history, he defines leadership as a mutual process based on an ethic of care for the follower that is focused on socially desirable ends. To determine socially desirable ends and to act in ways that show caring, leaders need to be guided by ethics and morals. The focus on purpose and the ends of leadership is also a new aspect of this theory. Earlier leadership theories focused on outcomes but almost exclusively on the outcomes of organizational effectiveness and performance. Although effectiveness may be socially desirable, in transformational leadership theory moral ends (such as equity) now take prominence over purely functionalist objectives.

Transformational leadership is still leader focused and hierarchical. As Rost (1991) notes, transformational leadership acts as a bridge between old and new views of leadership. Transformational leadership begins to conceptualize leadership as a process by emphasizing the interaction between leaders and followers. By distinguishing between leaders and followers, however, this approach remains hierarchical in orientation. Most studies of transformational leadership generally focus on the leader and less so on the process and interactions between leader and followers. The focus of research tends to be on the identification of characteristics or qualities of transformational leadership such as inspiration, trust, passion, and commitment.

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Many current concepts in the larger leadership literature such as ethics, social change, and empowerment are directly influenced by transformational leadership. A major contribution of transformational leadership research has been its role in bringing new concepts to the study of leadership, many of which are reviewed in the following chapter. Perhaps no other theory in the last twenty years has helped to bring so many new concepts to the practice of leadership and redirected the direction of leadership research as transformational leadership.

### ***Key Findings and Insights***

Most current transformational leadership research focuses on providing empirical evidence for the concepts Burns (1978) articulated in his seminal work, *Leadership*. Bass (1985) helped operationalize and test the notion of transformational leadership, developing a survey instrument called the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ), which examines four main factors—charisma, inspiration, individualized consideration, and intellectual stimulation. In his research, Bass asked people to describe individuals they considered to be transformational leaders. He continues to follow up on this work, trying to distinguish between authentic transformational leadership and pseudo-transformational leaders who do not have an ethical underpinning (Bass and Steidlmeier, 1999). Also building on Burns's work, Kouzes and Posner (2002) studied leaders who were considered “great,” asking them to write detailed memoirs in an attempt to better understand the qualities of transformational leaders. They identified five types of behavior that is part of transformational leadership: challenging the process (searching for opportunities and experimenting); inspiring a shared vision (motivating people toward a vision); enabling others to act (fostering collaboration and self-development); modeling the way (setting an example); and encouraging the heart (celebrating achievements). After years of conceptualizing and defining transformational leadership with disagreements about the role of morality (Burns versus Bass) and the emphasis on particular behaviors (Bass versus Kouzes and Posner), studies began to be conducted to better describe and understand the effects of transformational leadership. For example, research using the MLQ has consistently shown that transformational leadership behaviors are positively

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associated with leaders' effectiveness and lead to more satisfaction among followers than transactional leadership behaviors (Avolio and Bass, 1991; Zacharatos, Barling, and Kelloway, 2000). Although disagreement still exists over an exact definition, a consensus is emerging among researchers.

Other important studies of transformational leadership have focused on how leaders develop and cultivate vision, how leaders empower rather than manipulate, the organizational context of transformational leadership, and the importance of transformational leaders' working to construct a functional culture where transformational leadership is possible (Avolio and Bass, 1991; Bass, 1997; Schein, 1992; Zacharatos, Barling, and Kelloway, 2000). Studies have also demonstrated the importance of leaders' articulating a clear and appealing vision that is relevant to the needs and values of followers. Leaders can improve the communication of their vision by using emotional appeals, symbols, metaphors, rituals, and dramatic staged events.

Other researchers have been concerned with the generalizability of transformational leadership attributes across cultures, a topic of growing significance, given the global nature of contemporary society. The Global Leadership and Organizational Effectiveness project (GLOBE) examined transformational leadership behaviors and attributes across sixty-two international cultures (Den Hartog and others, 1999). The goal of this project was to study whether or not certain traits of transformational leadership transcended cultures. Despite traditionally recognized social and cultural differences, the findings of this project support the claim that certain attributes are universally considered to represent transformational leaders. Leaders who were encouraging, positive, motivational, builders of confidence, dynamic, and demonstrated foresight were found to be transformational in most of the cultures studied (Den Hartog and others, 1999). Leadership traits that were considered impediments were also studied, with certain traits such as risk taking found to be valued differently across cultures.

### ***Criticisms, Problems, and Issues***

Some concerns about transformational leadership are related to whether the transformational leadership model is a generalizable model in all organizational and societal contexts. Is it a western construction, or, as explored in the GLOBE



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project, is it relevant in other cultures? (Shamir and Howell, 1999). Concerns also exist about the hierarchical leader–centric nature of this approach. Barker (2001) suggests that the focus on “superior/subordinate” relationships overshadows other important organizational and contextual variables related to leadership.

Bass and Steidlmeier (1999) suggest that many recent studies of transformational leadership lack some of the central components (such as ethics) and as a result are not really studying transformational leadership as defined by Burns (1978). Harkening back to the early notions of transformational leadership in the late 1970s, they assert that for leadership to be considered transformational, it must be guided by moral and ethical considerations. This distinction between what constitutes authentic transformational leadership and other definitions provides one example of how this theory has evolved over the past fifteen years. Scholarly dialogue on the definition and theoretical focus of transformational leadership continues to be relevant, however, given the reemergence of morality and ethics in current leadership literature. As research continues to be conducted, transformational leadership remains an important albeit somewhat contested concept for understanding effective leadership.

### ***Summary of Transformational Leadership***

Leadership is viewed as a mutual process focused on care for followers and the pursuit of socially desirable ends.

Research, grounded in a power and influence approach to leadership, maintains a focus on hierarchy and positional leaders.

The ethical purposes and moral ends of leadership are prioritized.

Leadership for empowerment and social change are emphasized.

Key transformational leadership research findings include that (1) transformational leadership behaviors such as inspiring vision and celebrating achievement are associated with higher levels of leader effectiveness and follower satisfaction than transactional leadership; (2) the articulation of a clear and compelling vision that matches followers’ needs and values is important; and (3) transformational leadership transcends cultural boundaries with certain attributes and behaviors universally recognized as transformational.



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## Complexity and Chaos Theory

### *Definition and Emergence*

As Rost (1991) noted, scholars became suspicious of the reductionist and simple views of leadership, especially as the context for leadership grew more complex, and they began to search for new ways of understanding leadership more fitting for the times and challenges. One response has been for researchers to study the complexity and chaos of leadership and the organizations where it takes place (Anderson, 1999; Axelrod and Cohen, 1999; Depree, 1992; Handy, 1996; Heifetz and Linsky, 2002; Komives, Lucas, and McMahon, 1998; Marion, 1999; Marion and Uhl-Bien, 2001; Phillips and Hunt, 1992). Chaos theory challenges the simplicity of earlier theories such as contingency approaches where leaders simply match a leadership style to a task or preference of followers. Instead, external challenges and the environment in organizations should be examined and taken into account to understand leadership. For example, as technology alters the ability to communicate and to work together, making access to individuals and information more readily available, it is assumed that it will affect the leadership process. This theory emerged in the hard sciences but has been adapted in recent years to the social sciences and examinations of complexity in human systems. Two major writers addressing this theory are Margaret J. Wheatley (1999) and Ronald A. Heifetz (1994).

Many credit Wheatley's *Leadership and the New Science* (1999) for bridging chaos theory and leadership. Her book describes the implications of chaos theory for organizational life, suggesting we should reexamine our traditional assumptions about how organizations operate and how leadership should be practiced. She also challenges traditional notions of hierarchy and authority in organizations. Decentralization, dedifferentiation of tasks (spanning boundaries and breaking down organizational barriers), collaboration, flexibility and adaptability of structures and processes, participation, and autonomy characterize the postmodern organization. Traditional notions of leadership embedded in centralization, differentiation of task, hierarchy, rigidity and control, exclusiveness, and individuality are poorly suited for organizations needed to respond to the complex environment.

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Another work that helps understand leadership as a complex process is Heifetz's *Leadership Without Easy Answers* (1994). The primary assumption of this book is that leadership has often been characterized and studied as routine and technical responses to situations and problems; however, most situations and tasks really require an adaptive and complex response. Routine problems are clearly definable and easily fixed by technical experts. Heifetz believes that routine problems do not require leadership; rather, problems that are difficult to define should be the focus. He notes that adaptive challenges require experiments, new discoveries, and adjustments from numerous places in the organization. Without learning "changing attitudes, values, and behaviors, people cannot make the adaptive leap necessary to thrive in the new environment" (Heifetz and Linksy, 2002, p. 13). Adaptive work is generative, multidimensional, multilevel, chaotic, and anxiety provoking. Leadership takes place in the community by mobilizing expertise and working to develop novel solutions. Routine responses will not help address adaptive challenges that are the work of leadership. Again, leadership is no longer a predictable process that requires the application of a set of characteristics, skills, or behaviors. Instead, it is a process that embraces a complex approach of learning, non-mechanized and innovative solutions, and collective action and reflection. The chaos theory literature continues to expand and helps us rethink leadership as an ambiguous and multifaceted topic.

### ***Major Assumptions and Advantages***

As noted, collaboration, breaking down hierarchy, local decision making, and organic processes characterize leadership in chaos theory. In contrast to typical bureaucratic approaches to decision making, systems thinking is emphasized. In chaos theory, the notion of linear, controllable, and universalistic patterns of operation are challenged. Simple, straightforward rules of operation or universalistic principles of leading are shown to be inadequate in a world of complex everchanging conditions (Heifetz and Linksy, 2002; Marion, 1999; Marion and Uhl-Bien, 2001; Phillips and Hunt, 1992; Wheatley, 1999). In chaos theory, local and context-based factors strongly affect institutional operations, but beneath the surface of high levels of autonomy, local conditions, and multiple sources of input are simple organizing principles that undergird

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all systems. Thus, chaos theory demonstrates that leadership is the practice of combining simple rules that are adaptive to multiple local conditions. A greater order exists that cannot be seen in the chaos of local contexts. The order and the universal laws are found at a holistic or systems level, not in specific organizations. Moreover, the imperfection in our vision (or our inability to identify the order in the chaos) is the reason we have fragmented our work lives into the bureaucratic roles and divisions indicative of modern organizational forms. The essence of a strong organization and good leader is working at a more holistic systems level, focusing on the relationships among roles and tasks rather than seeing them as discrete parts.

This theory also suggests the importance of relationships and connections, as the world is interdependent and connected in a system (Wheatley, 1999). Relationships inside and outside the organization are paramount for cultivating and maintaining leadership activity. Leaders also need to keep connected to the outside world so that they can adjust to environmental changes.

Complexity and chaos theory make several contributions to leadership. First, complexity theory helped leadership researchers to expand their notions of context as they examined the leadership process from broader social and technical system perspectives. Rather than framing context as a static organizational variable, chaos and complexity theorists recognize the dynamic and changing nature of leadership contexts. Second, the notion of the postmodern organization and the way leadership would be unique in this type of organizational context has helped expand leadership research in new directions. For example, many organizations have now transformed the way they operate and are organized. Third, complexity theory introduced new concepts into the leadership vocabulary such as networks and systems thinking as well as reinforced concepts that were emerging such as partnering, collaboration, local decision making, and globalization.

### ***Key Findings and Insights***

Research supports the notion that taking complexity into account improves the effectiveness of leaders (Heifetz and Linksy, 2002). Most research on complexity theory, however, suggests it is difficult to study, remains incomplete, and must be more carefully operationalized to study consistently

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(Osborn, Hunt, and Jauch, 2002; Satish and Streufert, 1997). Because of the challenges related to measuring elements of complexity and leadership, multiple research approaches (quantitative and qualitative studies) have been used. In essence, few studies have been definitive in terms of understanding the relationship of complexity, chaos, and leadership.

Quantitative studies have primarily been used as a means of prediction and to provide statistical significance associated with complexity. For example, a study by Streufert and Nogami (1989) measured the complexity of managerial behavior and effectiveness using a set of numeric measures. Participants were assessed using structural measurement techniques that ascribed a numerical value to complex traits at various levels: simple activities, breadth, strategy, high-level strategic planning, and the ability to shift network characteristics and environments (Streufert and Nogami, 1989). Performance on these designated tasks correlated meaningfully with leadership complexity. For example, managers who scored highly in addressing nonstable situations scored more highly in leadership complexity than those who performed more efficiently in less chaotic and complex scenarios. These findings indicate the ability to predict how well leaders will perform and adapt to a range of structural and environmental complexities. This study is limited, however, in its predictive capacity and, like many quantitative studies of complexity, by its lack of external validity and practical application (Streufert, 1997).

Because relationships and interactions are so important, complexity studies have focused on examining networks and how they are developed. For example, Regine and Lewin (2000) studied multiple levels of complex dynamics in organizational networks. In an ethnography of a dozen American and British companies that exhibited principles of complexity, they examined the significance of leaders and their practices in creating and enhancing networks. Their findings suggest that in complex systems leaders and agents affect each other in ways that can foster creativity and adaptability. They also found that the creation of networks is one of the most important contributions made by leaders in complex environments (Marion and Uhl-Bien, 2001). These findings are particularly useful in understanding the practices of complex leaders as well as reframing nonlinear and nontraditional organizational practices.

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### ***Critiques, Problems, and Issues***

On a practical level, we need to understand the trade-offs between the advantages of cognitive complexity and people's capacity to absorb complexity. Perhaps some personality types are better able to adapt to complexity. Myers-Briggs typology, for example, suggests that certain individuals do not respond well to complexity. In a team approach to leadership, group members can work together to confront and engage complexity. We may need to understand the advantages of teams for a leadership process that is tied to complexity. We know teams can be more cognitively complex than individuals (Bensimon and Neumann, 1993); therefore, we need a much deeper understanding that moves from conceptual to practical about how complexity can be best engaged by change agents and groups in day-to-day activities.

From a research perspective, complexity and chaos have proved difficult to study. Some researchers have suggested that to truly understand complexity and chaos in systems all levels need to be examined simultaneously. For leadership, it would mean studying how a particular action of a leader affects individuals, groups, organizational culture and climate, and the external environment or how an action in the external environment affects leaders, groups, and the organizational culture and climate. It is assumed, however, that patterns in the system will be nonlinear and random so that following such patterns is more difficult than in functionalist research. As noted, quantitative studies of complexity often lack external validity and practical application (Streufert, 1997). In describing the importance of appropriate research methods in the study of complexity, Marion and Uhl-Bien (2001) explain the value of qualitative approaches such as ethnography in analyzing complex interactions. They note qualitative methods reach beyond the scope of quantitative studies to capture complicated multidimensional interactions. More studies from a qualitative perspective may help to shed more light on chaos and complexity and their relationship to leadership. If complexity is hard to operationalize in practice and difficult to study, is it a valuable approach?

### ***Summary of Complexity and Chaos Theories***

Theoretical framework is grounded in assumptions of postmodern organizational life.

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## **From Conflict to Collaboration: The Benefits of Chaos and Complexity**

Upon reviewing the annual reports submitted by department directors in her division, the vice chancellor for student affairs identified several leadership challenges of concern across the division. Specifically, department directors repeatedly articulated frustrations associated with the unrealistic expectations of the university's technology strategic plan, the inflexible nature of the division's assessment model, and rigid personnel policies that hinder the pursuit of balance between personal and professional responsibilities. In addition, constraints on fiscal resources coupled with increased student demand have sparked conflict between department directors competing for discretionary funding from the vice chancellor's office. In an attempt to address these concerns, the vice chancellor pulls Wheatley's *Leadership and the New Science* (1999) and Heifetz's *Leadership Without Easy Answers* (1994) from her bookshelf and begins to sketch out a plan for using chaos and complexity theories of leadership to improve relationships in the division and to enhance organizational performance.

Drawing on the principles of systems thinking, local decision making, organizational adaptability, and collaboration, the vice chancellor begins to work with her staff on revising existing organizational policies and procedures that have historically emphasized control, consistency, and rigid organizational boundaries. Rather than continuing to impose uniform assessment standards and personnel policies on all student affairs departments, the vice chancellor decides to

Traditional notions of hierarchy and bureaucratic decision making are challenged.

Decentralization, dedifferentiation of tasks, collaboration, flexibility, systems thinking, and adaptability of organizational structures are emphasized.

Leaders are called on to operate at the systems level, focusing on the connections between organizational roles and tasks as well as fostering interdependent relationships inside and outside the organization.

Complex leadership challenges require organizational learning, collaboration, reflection, and innovative solutions.

Complexity and chaos theories of leadership are difficult to operationalize for research purposes.

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collaborate with staff members on the articulation of a clear organizational vision and guiding set of values that will inform a decentralized decision-making process. In this new model of local leadership and decision making, the directors are provided with the autonomy essential for addressing the specific contextual needs of their departments and encouraged to explore innovative strategies for addressing complex leadership challenges. Rather than continuing to implement the standard program assessment plan that privileges objective measures of program quality (such as attendance, participant satisfaction, and fiscal efficiency), the Office of Multicultural Affairs decides to carry out a qualitative assessment project that seeks to understand the subjective experiences of students involved in multicultural organizations advised by their office. In addition, under this new leadership framework, each student affairs department is encouraged to develop a specific technology plan that reflects the division's commitment to technological advancement yet is grounded in a realistic assessment of the internal and external contextual factors that will shape technology integration in the department. Given that both chaos and complexity theories of leadership place a high value on relationships and collective action, the vice chancellor makes sure that collaboration is included on the list of key organizational values and establishes a discretionary funding framework that promotes boundary-spanning collaborations rather than competition. At the heart of the vice chancellor's new leadership framework is a belief that simple organizing principles, not rigid rules and hierarchical structures, are the most effective means for cultivating organizational environments that demonstrate a focus on learning, reflection, collaboration, and innovation—four dimensions of leadership essential for addressing the complex leadership challenges of the twenty-first century.

## Expanding Cognitive Theories: Mental Models and Organizational Learning

### *Definition and Emergence*

An emerging area of research reviewed in the 1989 volume by Bensimon, Neumann, and Birnbaum was cognitive theories of leadership that take into consideration mental processes such as error judgment and attribution. Given that many strands and approaches exist to studying leadership from a cognitive perspective, it is difficult to offer a single definition for cognitive theories of leadership. In general, however, cognitive theories tend to focus on the



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mental processes of leaders or other individuals involved in leadership processes.

In the last fifteen years, the area of cognition has focused on expanding and testing attribution theories of leadership, examining how people assign causes to interpersonal events and organizational outcomes. These studies help explain the mental processes by which individuals attribute certain actions and outcomes to leaders (Chemers, 1997). Another line of cognitive research using a social constructivist paradigm has studied the dubious value of leadership for explaining organizational outcomes. This research suggests that people want to believe in leadership and therefore mentally construct such a phenomenon to facilitate cognitive processing of organizational events (Chemers, 1997). In addition to these expansions of attribution theories (noted as an emerging area in the 1989 volume), learning and mental models or lenses have been added to the literature in recent years.

### ***Major Assumptions and Advantages***

A major assumption of this theoretical perspective is that the meaning and importance of leadership cannot be understood by analyzing traits or behaviors; instead, the thought and interpretation processes of individuals are believed to provide greater insight into all aspects of the leadership process. Intentions, perception, and other mental processes have previously been ignored in the leadership literature. A variety of researchers believe that this omission was a great weakness in our understanding because even if a leader says he or she is exhibiting a particular behavior, it does not mean that followers perceive that behavior the same way the leader intended. In addition, theories such as transformational leadership focus on the emotional side of leadership, ignoring how a leader's thought processes or learning affects his performance.

Some of the advantages of cognitive theories become evident in reviewing these assumptions. First, they recognize an important and unstudied area of leadership—cognitive processes. Second, they open the door for studies from a social constructivist paradigm that also emphasize interpretation and subjective experience. Third, they demystify the importance of the leader and help support emerging leadership theories that focus on leadership as a process. From a practical perspective, leaders find the attention to mental processes

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helpful, as they perceive such processes to be a dimension of leadership over which they have control and see the potential for skill development.

### ***Key Insights and Research***

The notion of mental models or cognitive mind-sets has become a major area of research in the last twenty years. Leadership scholars suggest that the work of leaders is using complex mind-sets to analyze and assess leadership issues. One of the main works that relies on mental models for understanding leadership is Bolman and Deal's *Reframing Organizations* (2003). These authors demonstrate that leaders tend to examine situations through one or more lenses or cognitive orientations (political, symbolic, structural, human resource). Different situations might require different cognitive approaches to leadership; a political orientation might serve a leader in one situation, while a bureaucratic orientation is important in another. Successful leaders move between various lenses or approaches to leadership and use all cognitive lenses rather than focusing on the one or two with which they feel most comfortable. The concept of mental models takes a socially constructed view of leadership in which leaders interpret the situation from multiple perspectives and make assessments to determine an appropriate approach to leadership. In this theoretical framework, leaders are not simply matching a particular leadership style to a fixed organizational reality; rather, they must artfully analyze the specific (and changing) needs of the organization based on data gathered from multiple perspectives. Leaders are encouraged to develop reflection skills, to carefully analyze situations through multiple cognitive lenses, and to realize that leadership contexts are specific to a situation and require individualized responses. (Several specific examples are provided in "Higher Education Leadership in the New World.")

In addition to research on mental models, learning has been a major area of study in cognitive theory. The focus on complexity and ambiguity in the postmodern paradigm led scholars to realize the importance of learning to the leadership process and begin a line of research solely on this concept (Griffin, 2002; Neumann, 1991; Shapiro, 2003; Vaill, 1996). For example, Heifetz (1994) and Wheatley (1999) reviewed the critical role of learning in addressing the adaptive and systems challenges faced by organizations. The

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concept of learning became particularly important in the 1990s in response to concerns that American firms and their leaders were unable to respond to challenges from the external environment and that bureaucratic structures had created inflexible environments where workers no longer engaged in thoughtful reflection (Senge, 1990a; Vaill, 1991, 1996). The literature on leadership and learning focuses on creating organizations that can be adaptable, flexible, experimental, and innovative. Learning is important to leadership at both the individual and organizational level. Ramsden (1998) and Bennis and Goldsmith (1997) emphasize the importance of leaders' thinking of their own development or learning, providing a blueprint for developing a leadership learning agenda. A renewed focus is apparent on the ways that leaders need to constantly renew their skills and conceptualize leadership as a lifetime journey (Komives, Lucas, and McMahon, 1998; Shapiro, 2003; Tomlinson, 2004; Van Velsor and Drath, 2003).

Another prominent example of the significance of learning for leadership is Lambert and others' *The Constructivist Leader* (2002), which suggests that leadership is about seeking improvement through the open, democratic processes of learning and problem solving. The leader's role is building learning communities committed to improving the lives of her or his stakeholders.<sup>1</sup> The leader's work in building learning communities entails creating trust through social and professional relationships, identifying and reconstructing commonly held assumptions and beliefs, building new shared knowledge, and altering individual and group behaviors to create new ways of working (Shapiro, 2003). Leadership is about leading different types of conversations, including dialogic, inquiring, sustaining, and partnering, which contribute to collaborative sense-making, remembrance and reflection, sharing and building ideas, listening, connectivity, common purpose, and vision (Lambert and others, 2002).

At the organizational level, "leaders are responsible for building organizations where people are continually expanding their capabilities to shape their future—that is, leaders are responsible for learning among others" (Senge, 1990b, p. 9). Additionally, leaders play a critical role in helping institutions surface mental models (basic beliefs and assumptions), detect errors, and create environmental supports for learning (for example, breaking down hierarchical

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structures). To encourage and overcome threats to learning, Senge (1990a) suggests five disciplines for leaders: systems thinking, mental models, personal mastery, shared vision, and team learning or dialogue. In this framework, the leader plays a very different role in organizations from in the past, when he or she was a charismatic or authoritarian leader. Instead, the leader acts as teacher, designer, and steward. As a teacher, leaders motivate others to develop a learning plan (an approach to personal mastery), linking individual and institutional learning. Essentially the leader's role is to inspire and motivate people to learn, a leadership challenge that can lead the organization in unpredictable and different directions. The predictions and generalizations common in positivist theories of leadership are no longer described in these new cognitive theories of leadership, as the future is largely unknown. The teacher also helps surface mental models that prevent individuals from learning, asking critical questions, and embracing new ideas. As designers, teachers create and develop support for a shared vision that serves to focus people's learning. As stewards, leaders focus on supporting people so that they feel part of a team and the larger purpose of the organization. Systems thinking is key throughout each of the roles described above. For example, it is used in the role of teacher to help people think about their contribution to a complex organization and in the role of designer to develop a structure that supports learning. True to the assumptions of social constructivism, learning theories focus on interpretation and meaning making while also adopting postmodern assumptions about the importance of truly understanding the complexity and ambiguity of organizations through systems thinking.

### ***Critique, Problems, and Issues***

Although learning is significant in these models, learning and intellect have historically been downplayed in the leadership literature. Transformational leadership models, for example, do not place any importance on the role of learning or an intellectual role for leaders (although they do note that the leader challenges followers' assumptions, which might be a form of learning, and that one of the common measures of transformational leadership is intellectual stimulation). The importance of learning to leadership varies vastly in the research. For example, limited empirical research to date supports the idea

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that learning creates more effective leaders, yet a plethora of research suggests that learning is important to other organizational functions such as decision making (Senge, 1990a). More research is needed to determine the importance of learning for leadership and bridge the gap in existing scholarship. Other criticisms have been leveled against cognitive leadership perspectives: some researchers believe learning is a fad focused on creating greater innovation in organizations but is not inherently part of leadership (Birnbaum, 2000), and other scholars assert attribution theories are not helpful and provide no guidance for practice (Rost, 1991).

### ***Summary of Cognitive Theories***

Theoretical framework is informed by social constructivist and postmodern paradigms of leadership.

The thought processes and interpretations of individuals involved in the leadership process are the focus of research.

Studies of attribution, learning, and mental models are three prominent strands of cognitive leadership research.

Individuals examine leadership challenges and contexts through one or more cognitive lenses (political, symbolic, structural), with different situations requiring different cognitive orientations.

Individual and organizational learning is critical to the cultivation of adaptable, flexible, and innovative leadership processes.

Limited empirical research exists regarding whether or not learning fosters more effective leaders.

## **Expanding Cultural and Symbolic Theories: Social and Cultural Theories of Leadership**

### ***Definition and Emergence***

As noted earlier, cultural and symbolic theories of leadership focus on the importance of values, meaning, interpretation, history and traditions, context, and symbolic elements in leadership processes. Cultural and symbolic theories

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of leadership are relatively new in this area of scholarship, having emerged in the mid- to late 1980s. In the last ASHE-ERIC volume synthesizing the research on higher education leadership (Bensimon, Neumann, and Birnbaum, 1989), very few studies had been conducted from a cultural and symbolic approach. Many studies now, however, have examined the way leadership is affected by values and symbolic dimensions, the context-based and historical influence on leadership, and the way leadership is interpreted distinctly by followers or how leaders' beliefs shape culture.

The focus in cultural theories is that leadership functions in a complex social system. Earlier trait or behavior theories tended to isolate the leader or examine interactions between leader and followers. Instead, these theories emphasize leadership's taking place in a unit, an organization, and a broader social system. Moreover, cultural theories tend to reflect constructivist assumptions and see leadership as invented or created among people and not as a social reality that is discovered. As this theory emerged, scholars also recognized the important role of leaders in developing and shaping the culture of an organization, institution, or society.

### ***Major Assumptions and Advantages***

One advantage and contribution of studying leadership from a cultural perspective is the rising prominence of an important leadership construct that had been overlooked in earlier research—the value dimension of leadership. In many ways, Burns's work (1978) on transformational leadership might be credited with the emergence of cultural theories of leadership, as his book on leadership describes the importance of purpose and values in the leadership process, opening the doors for studies from a cultural perspective. In addition to bringing to light an important area of leadership that had not been studied (values), research from a cultural perspective also emphasizes the importance of context in a new way. In the past context had been studied mostly from an organizational structure perspective (for example, examining whether or not an organization was centralized or decentralized). Context from a cultural perspective examines the history, traditions, rituals, and major assumptions of an institution that shape and frame the way people make meaning. Cultural theories brought a new

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orientation to the study of context, creating other lines of research such as processual leadership (reviewed in the next section).

The advantages of cultural theory are quite significant. Leadership is seen in a much broader perspective as part of the human condition and a vital part of any culture. In addition to providing many new areas of leadership study such as symbols of meaning, cultural theories of leadership have also provided a temporal perspective to leadership research, recognizing the importance of the history of a society or organization to the leadership process.

### ***Key Insights and Research***

Over the last twenty years, numerous studies have examined the relationship between various cultural constructs (history and values, for example) and the leadership process, demonstrating that culture is indeed a very significant and important component of leadership (see details of a variety of studies from the higher education literature in “Higher Education Leadership in the New World”). This chapter highlights the ways that the leadership research from a cultural perspective has evolved in recent years, taking new directions in the study of values, gender, race, and cross-cultural issues (see, for example, Astin and Leland, 1991; Ayman, 1993; Banks, 1995; Bell, 1988; Bensimon, 1989a; Cantor and Bernay, 1992; Helgesen, 1990; Kezar 2000, 2002a, 2002c; Morrison, 1991, 1996; Offermann and Phan, 2002; Rosener, 1990; Statham, 1987; Tierney, 1993b; Valverde, 2003)—cultural phenomena previously ignored by leadership scholars.

As mentioned earlier, the emergence of values as an important leadership construct can be attributed to the rising prominence of research on cultural leadership. Similar to culture, many definitions and interpretations of values exist, and values can be manifested in multiple ways throughout an organization. Not to be mistaken for moral or ethical values (treated elsewhere), values in this section represent what Deal and Peterson (1999) describe as one of a number of central beliefs that construct the “bedrock” of organizational culture. This section focuses narrowly on how leaders’ values affect organizations. Although traditionally considered in abstract terms, contemporary research has shown that leaders’ values play a significant and precise role in the construction of organizational culture. In *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, Schein (1992) draws on years of research with some of America’s most well-known organizations to inform his



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argument that leaders' values underpin most organizational cultures. He describes culture as being multifaceted and consisting of three key layers. In the first layer, the one closest to the surface, are visible organizational behaviors and practices. Underlying those behaviors in the second layer are espoused values that represent organizational philosophies and understandings. The third and deepest layer of culture consists of values and core beliefs that construct the philosophies represented by organizational actions. It is at this level, the deepest source of organizational ideologies, where leaders' values are most influential. Schein explains that when groups and cultures are first created, they adopt the thoughts, beliefs, and assumptions of certain individuals. Those individuals, who are often later identified as leaders, play a central role in determining the philosophies and subsequent actions of an organization and its constituents. One example from higher education is the founding members of a college or university. The core principles that guide an institutional mission are frequently the direct results of one key individual and his or her beliefs and values. In many instances these values are passed on for centuries without being questioned. A second and more important example involves organizational change. In many instances organizational change cannot take place effectively unless the change is compatible with leaders' values and beliefs (Schein, 1992).

With respect to cultural research on gender and leadership, studies of women leaders have illustrated that women tend to define and understand leadership in ways not reflected in traditional models based on all-male research samples (Astin and Leland, 1991; Bensimon and Neumann, 1993; Kezar, 2000, 2002b, 2002c; Rhode, 2003). For example, women's leadership is associated with a more participatory, relational, and interpersonal style and with different types of power and influence strategies emphasizing reciprocity and collectivity. Moreover, women leaders tend to conceptualize leadership as collective rather than individualistic, emphasize responsibility toward others and the empowerment of others to act in the organization, and deemphasize hierarchical relationships (Amey and Twombly, 1992; Astin and Leland, 1991; Cantor and Bernay, 1992; Ferguson, 1984; Helgesen, 1990; Kezar, 2000, 2002b, 2002c; Rosener, 1990; Statham, 1987).

A few studies of leadership beliefs among people of color in the United States have found distinctions in the way that Native Americans

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(community oriented, focus on wisdom, spirituality) and African Americans (nonhierarchical, community based, focus on spirituality) define leadership; findings have been mixed for Hispanics (Ayman, 1993; Kezar, 2000, 2002b, 2002c; Kezar and Moriarty, 2000). Some studies also examine the overlap of social and cultural differences (Kezar, 2002b, 2002c). For example, studies of African American women find that they have more direct communication styles than white women and focus more on spirituality (Rhode, 2003). One researcher has developed a pluralistic approach to leadership that demonstrates the importance of leaders' reflecting actively on their backgrounds as well as understanding and engaging the diversity of leadership approaches from people of varying backgrounds (Kezar, 2000, 2002b, 2002c). The cultural and social differences are described as emerging from the specific experiences of being a woman or a minority, not something essential about being a woman or a minority. Therefore, different cultural experiences can result in specific sensitivities or beliefs about leadership.

Cross-cultural studies have exploded in the literature in the last decade (Dickson, Den Hartog, and Mitchelson, 2003; Dorfman, 1996; House, Wright, and Aditya, 1997). Dickson, Den Hartog, and Mitchelson (2003) describe how, since 1996, the quest for universal leadership principles has declined and an awareness of differences risen based on research grounded in Hofstede's cultural dimensions (1980). Cultural leadership research examines a host of issues, including differences between individualist countries (a focus on individual achievement and rights) and collective societies (a focus on collective achievement and rights) as well as the possibility of clustering countries based on similar contexts or histories (Ah Chong and Thomas, 1997; Ensari and Murphy, 2003; Hofstede, 1997; House and others, 2004; Offermann and Phan, 2002). Others have developed complex matrixes representing the differences in the traits, behaviors, and power and influence processes of leaders across a host of countries (Gerstner and Day, 1994). Countries have also been labeled according to cultural norms related to leadership such as performance oriented, team oriented, participative, humane, autonomous, self-protective, and group protective. The studies reveal specific ways that leadership is defined among eastern (collective, holistic, spirituality based) and western (hierarchical, authority based, and individualistic) cultures

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(Ayman, 1993; Cox, 1993; Ensari and Murphy, 2003). These various research programs demonstrate how leaders' backgrounds—their cultural experiences and traditions—alter their leadership beliefs and actions. They also demonstrate how leadership is affected by the characteristics of different cultural contexts. Certain characteristics and behaviors have been found to be more universal such as honesty, motivation, dependability, and encouragement, whereas other qualities have been found to be culturally contingent such as ambition, autonomy, compassion, enthusiasm, orderliness, risk taking, or sensitivity. Several models of multicultural leadership have been proposed based on social and cross-cultural research (Den Hartog and others, 1999; Gerstner and Day, 1994; Hofstede, 1980; House and others, 2004).

Recent studies have applied findings from cultural and social leadership research to develop instruments for measuring leaders' cross-cultural knowledge to enhance leadership development programs and activities (McCauley and Van Velsor, 2003). They observe that assessment of and feedback on leaders' performance (usually in the form of surveys) are themselves affected by cultural norms about whether one can be open and honest with coworkers; the notion of criticizing is foreign in some cultures, and trust is often lacking in others. Because psychology, the discipline that develops the surveys, and survey methodology are considered more western approaches, they also suggest creating forms of development that fit better in the cultural context—for example, journaling. An important first step is for leaders to read about and become aware of cultural differences in their beliefs and behaviors so that they can act more appropriately in the context. Leaders are encouraged to learn the art of perspective taking, which involves listening to and absorbing information skillfully, recognizing that other people may view a situation differently, understanding that other people's assumptions may be different, and accepting the limitations of one's own point of view.

### ***Critiques, Problems, and Issues***

Some researchers believe research is minimal to support leadership differences based on gender and race (Chemers, 1997). These scholars acknowledge cultural variation in the ways that leadership relationships and behaviors are structured and interpreted but note that the “major functions of leadership have

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universal importance” (Chemers, 1997, p. 134). Nevertheless, researchers are mixed in their interpretation and view of how significant cultural and social categories are and their effect on leadership. Others believe that a danger exists of essentializing differences by focusing on group characteristics that may not represent individuals in these groups. These authors point out that some white men might operate in collaborative ways, while some African American woman might operate in hierarchical and top-down ways.

Another concern with cultural theories is that they tend to focus on leadership in a particular context and cannot be generalized to other settings or institutional cultures. If leadership is truly so context based, then research is limited in being able to guide leadership practice beyond helping leaders conduct analyses of their own environments. As leaders are left with little time to conduct detailed analysis of the history, values, and context of their own institutions, however, practitioners claim that this line of research is often not helpful in assisting them to improve leadership.

### ***Summary of Social and Cultural Theories***

Theoretical frameworks draw from postmodern, social constructivist, and critical paradigms of leadership.

The importance of values, meaning, interpretation, traditions, and symbolic elements of leadership is emphasized.

Leadership contexts are examined from a cultural rather than structural perspective.

Leadership processes are influenced by cultural contexts.

Attention is given to the gender, racial, and cross-cultural dimensions of leadership (for example, the collective and empowering nature of women’s leadership).

Individual leadership beliefs and actions are shaped by cultural background.

Awareness is heightened of the role leaders’ values play in shaping organizational culture and action.

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## **Different Strokes for Different Folks (Continued)**

minutes—a task that frequently limits her participation in committee discussions. In addition, returning committee members are always allowed to pick their preferred subcommittee assignments, while new members receive their assignments from the chair and are discouraged from advancing their own policy ideas until they are more familiar with the committee's established priorities and values. Ted did not question these norms when he assumed leadership of the committee, given that his personal framework of leadership is much more product oriented than process oriented, but Joan's explanation of the cultural leadership dynamics in the policy committee calls attention to the fact that many of Ted's leadership assumptions and behaviors are grounded in Western notions of hierarchy and control and thus are limited in their ability to meet the needs of culturally diverse leadership. Although he had intended to be the one doing most of the talking at this leadership transition meeting, Ted is thankful for the opportunity to listen and expresses his gratitude to Joan for introducing him to a new perspective on leadership. Despite the fact that his term as chair of the education policy committee is now coming to an end, Ted intends to draw on his emerging understanding of cultural leadership theory in his new role as chair of the psychology department, a diverse organization also struggling to reconcile multiple interpretations of effective leadership.

## **Rethinking Contingency Theories: Processual Leadership**

### ***Definition and Emergence***

Emerging in the 1960s with a recognition that certain leadership activities might require a different style or approach, situational and contingency models examine the relationship between microaspects of the organizational context (such as task design and subordinate development) and leadership (Fiedler, 1997). Accumulated contingency research findings suggest that aspects of the organization and leadership task affect the leadership process. Newer theories such as processual theory focus more broadly on notions of context and how they affect leadership (Fiedler, 1997).

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### ***Assumptions and Contributions***

Processual theory examines context from a constructivist rather than a functionalist paradigm (Dawson, 1994; Osborn, Hunt, and Jauch, 2002; Parry, 1998; Pettigrew, 1997; Pettigrew, Woodman, and Cameron, 2001). In other words, situations are not objective realities to which leaders respond. Instead, situations are interpreted and created by people in a setting. Moreover, leadership actions are not contingent on objective, fixed situational variables in the organization. Instead, situational aspects such as employee motivation or task design are interpreted by various people in the context.

In addition to focusing attention on context, processual leadership emphasizes the dynamic nature and process orientation of leadership. Processual leadership makes the importance of context more obvious by examining leadership over time and through a sequence of activities (Antonakis, Avolio, and Sivasubramaniam, 2003; Chaffee and Tierney, 1988; Chemers and Ayman, 1993; Dawson, 1994; Klenke, 1996; Neumann, 1995; Osborn, Hunt, and Jauch, 2002; Parry, 1998; Pettigrew, 1997; Pettigrew, Woodman, and Cameron, 2001; Shamir and Howell, 1999). Some have likened this approach to a shift from taking pictures or snapshots of leadership to developing a motion picture. Processual studies explore leadership development over long periods of time, highlighting the limitations of early psychologically oriented leadership studies that ignored context and process (Pettigrew, 1997). This line of research is more complex than administering a survey or conducting a few quick interviews. Processual research entails observation and prolonged engagement to address a question: How does a process of leadership emerge and change over time? Researchers look at a succession of tasks, events, crises, and other aspects of the process that help shed light on the leadership process as it unfolds. Accordingly, relationship development, collaboration, and social change (which can take a long time) are better understood through a processual approach.

Researchers also challenge the way context is defined in earlier contingency approaches that focus on microcontextual conditions (task design, employee motivation, leadership style) at the cost of ignoring macroissues such as institutional climate or culture, the larger society, and global economic conditions (Osborn, Hunt, and Jauch, 2002). In addition, processual researchers argue that views of context have been overly simplified, reduced to a set of six to eight variables that do

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not truly ascertain the complexity of how institutional contexts operate. Many of these studies emerge from anthropological and sociological approaches to the study of leadership, focusing on how organizations and societies have particular histories and cultures that affect organizational phenomena, including leadership.

These advances in contingency and situational theories of leadership provided in the processual approach are important and have helped to make this line of research stronger. The emergence of more complex views of leadership contexts has resulted in the identification of important concepts that warrant additional attention from leaders, including organizational history and culture and societal trends. In addition, similar to other theories reviewed earlier in this chapter, the importance of interpretation and perspective in the processual approach has added needed complexity.

### ***Key Research and Insights***

Several studies have demonstrated that context is socially constructed by individuals involved in a leadership process (Dawson, 1994; Neumann, 1995; Osborn, Hunt, and Jauch, 2002; Parry, 1998; Pettigrew, 1997; Pettigrew, Woodman, and Cameron, 2001). One person, for example, may perceive that a situation requires a task orientation while another may see this same situation as requiring a relational orientation. In addition, studies have demonstrated that leadership in some situations goes through cycles in which certain tasks, events, and issues tend to occur in regular sequences and are necessary for the leadership process to unfold (Dawson, 1994; Klenke, 1996; Osborn, Hunt, and Jauch, 2002; Parry, 1998; Pettigrew, 1997; Pettigrew, Woodman, and Cameron, 2001).

In addition to studies that challenge the objective and fixed character of situational and contingency models, other studies have expanded and reexamined the concept of context itself. Researchers are beginning to design studies of leadership context more complexly by examining macro (global economics), meso (institutional politics), and micro (employee motivation) conditions. For example, the major finding of Osborn, Hunt, and Jauch (2002) is that leadership is organizationally determined and that the culture and norms of organizations limit, enable, and affect the leadership processes. These authors demonstrate that people can go to training sessions to learn new leadership skills but will revert to the norms of the organization when they



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return. Organizations differ in many important conditions such as how people achieve positions of authority (elected, appointed, volunteer), how people influence one another in the organization, channels of communication, conditions of employment, and type of people employed (professionals, untrained workers, volunteers). As noted, every organization also has a distinctive organizational culture and history that further make the context unique.

Another line of research in this approach is the idea that leadership principles are specific to certain contexts and the specific aims of the leadership activity. Hargrove and Owens (2003) demonstrate that political leadership is distinct from leadership in business or educational settings. Leadership is illustrated to be inherently context bound. The skills, values, knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors required in one situation differ radically from those in another. Corporate managers, voluntary associations, and schools face different leadership needs and contexts. Thus, treating leadership as a universal phenomenon, as was usually the case in past research, is now considered problematic. Bensimon, Neumann, and Birnbaum (1989) also emphasized the importance of context and are among some of the first writers to focus on how the higher education setting requires a distinctive form of leadership, with different institutional types and divisions requiring different leadership.

### ***Critique, Problems, and Issues***

Many have begun to argue that context may be the most important factor affecting leadership and that it has largely been ignored over the years in leader-centric models focusing on traits, behaviors, power and influence strategies, and cognitive mind-sets. The importance of context is finally being acknowledged, yet many more studies need to be conducted to better understand the dynamics between the various levels of context. Most researchers lack a sustained research agenda to study leadership from this perspective over five or ten years, which makes it a less popular approach. In addition, tenure and promotion processes at universities often reward productivity in terms of yearly publications, and long-term studies often prevent researchers from meeting these institutional goals, which may deter some researchers from engaging in this form of research.

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### ***Summary of Processual Leadership***

This framework extends existing situational and contingency models of leadership.

It examines the effect of context on leadership from a constructivist paradigm (that is, context is believed to be socially constructed by individuals involved in the leadership process).

It emphasizes the process orientation of leadership that unfolds over time.

It focuses on the relationships between macrocontextual conditions (institutional culture, the larger society, global economic conditions) and leadership processes.

Research is characterized by prolonged engagement in the setting to observe leadership dynamics over time.

## **Team or Relational Leadership**

### ***Definition and Emergence***

In an update of his leadership textbook, Northouse (2004) notes a new approach or body of research in traditional leadership literature—team leadership. The notion of team leadership was foreshadowed by critiques of modern organizations as rigid, lacking in innovation, and bureaucratic—needing greater flexibility to work together. Traditional individualistic leadership was also critiqued by complexity theories that emphasize networks and group work. Studies of women and cross-cultural leaders demonstrate a preference for collective work. Given these many precursors, it is not surprising that the notion of team leadership emerged. Leadership teams serve many important institutional purposes, from planning and completing tasks to providing intellectual discourse and problem solving to drawing people together to provide support to identifying connections and ways groups can assist each other. This approach is described in two distinctive ways in the literature: one represents functionalist assumptions, the other social constructivist and critical theory assumptions.

In the first approach using functionalist assumptions, researchers study leadership teams to understand the best approach to fostering leadership in a team setting (Ilgen, Major, Hollenbeck and Sego, 1993; Kelly, 1998; Kinlaw,

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1998). Much of this literature combines principles from other recent approaches to leadership cited earlier in this chapter. For example, leaders need to foster learning in teams, be aware of the mental models of team members, and help teams manage and negotiate complexity and systems problems. The research in this area mirrors much of the behavior, situational, and power and influence theories reviewed in Bensimon, Neumann, and Birnbaum's earlier report on leadership (1989). It maintains functionalist assumptions and outlines characteristics such as teams' having clear goals, developing a collaborative culture, building confidence among team members, fostering technical competence, setting priorities, and measuring performance (Northouse, 2004).

The other approach is to see leadership as an inherent team process; it has been labeled team, relational, shared, and multilevel leadership (Bensimon and Neumann, 1993; Bradford and Cohen, 1998; Hackman, 1990; Helgesen, 1990; LaFasto and Larson, 2001; Riggio, Murphy, and Pirozzolo, 2002). This approach to a team model evolves from the critical paradigm of leadership and feminist studies of women leaders. A review of studies of women leaders revealed the prominent role of teams in this group's conception of leadership. From this perspective, leadership is defined as a collective and collaborative process focused on relationships and networks. In this volume, we focus on the second definition of team leadership as it reflects the values of the leadership revolution.

### ***Major Assumptions and Advantages***

Researchers such as Bensimon and Neumann (1993) distinguish teams as a culture from the traditional athletic metaphor of teams. The focus in a team process is on interconnectedness and working collectively (culture) rather than emphasizing individual players and results (the athletic metaphor of teams). In addition, all members are equal and deserve respect. The teams-as-cultures concept assumes that differences exist among people; this approach attempts to actively tap into and affirm differences. The purpose is to enlarge each member's understandings of others' views. Earlier research on teams often focused on consensus and shared understandings. In this line of research, differences and various interpretations are seen as the advantage of teams and a way to develop cognitive complexity.

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Interpretation and dialogue are also key elements in this model; different team members are encouraged to try to understand others' behavior and become more aware of perception and multiple interpretations. One way to better come to this understanding of the interpreted world is by engaging teams in dialogue. Much of the earlier research on teams focused on ways to make them more productive by emphasizing task efficiency. This new research on team leadership suggests that teams will not be effective unless they have ample time to build relationships and have significant dialogue before working on a task. The team as culture model also examines how the larger organization affects leadership, which is seen as a *process* rather than a person or group. Although it is assumed that the overall environment and context affect team leadership, research in this area has been limited.

A very similar model to the team approach is relational leadership, which emerged out of Rost's postindustrial model of leadership (1991) in which process and mutuality are emphasized over the individual leader or group. A relational view defines leadership as a process in which people working together attempt to accomplish change or make a difference to benefit the common good (Komives, Lucas, and McMahon, 1998). It has five primary components: leadership is inclusive of people and diverse points of view, empowers those involved, is purposeful and builds commitment toward common purposes, is ethical, and recognizes that all four of these elements are accomplished by being process oriented. The model is more complex than merely understanding and applying the five elements because each element entails learning knowledge, attitudes, and skills to successfully enact the elements. For example, Komives, Lucas, and McMahon (1998) note that to practice inclusiveness one needs to know oneself and others (knowledge), be open to difference and value all perspectives (attitude), and practice listening skills, building coalitions, and effective civil discourse (skills). This model emphasizes personal reflection, ethics, and inclusiveness. It also involves a commitment to understand organizational dynamics and thus how to build an inclusive and empowering environment, to motivate people and build coalitions, and to undertake a strong process focus.

Like the organizational learning approach to leadership, the benefits and advantages of team and relational approaches are prominent in the literature. For example, Bensimon and Neumann (1993) highlight how creative problem

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solving emerges among teams with diversely oriented minds. The other significant benefit of teams is smoothly implemented decisions by virtue of greater ownership by individuals throughout the organization.

The contribution from a research perspective is more difficult to ascertain. Viewing leadership as a collaborative and collective process is not unusual. A variety of theories reviewed earlier in this chapter suggest that leadership is collective and process oriented, and context was emphasized in our previous discussions of cultural and contingency theories. The main contributions of team leadership theory are identifying teams as the desired unit of analysis and focusing researchers' attention on the interpersonal dynamics of teams. Researchers in this tradition have asserted and tried to demonstrate that the team level is the critical level at which leadership can be understood. They acknowledge that societal and organizational context affects leadership but suggest that the key unit of analysis should be organizational and societal teams.

### ***Key Research and Insights***

Both conceptual and empirical scholarship underscore the inextricable relationship between leadership processes and team effectiveness. Indeed, Zaccaro, Rittman, and Marks (2001) assert that “effective leadership processes represent perhaps the most critical factor in the success of organizational teams” (p. 452). Drawing on previous studies of leadership and team performance, Zaccaro, Rittman, and Marks document the important role individual leaders play in facilitating the cognitive, motivational, affective, and coordination processes of teams. For example, through the motivational leadership processes of setting goals, providing feedback, and developing individual team members, leaders foster team task cohesion and collective efficacy—two essential dimensions of teamwork. Rather than framing the relationship between team leadership processes and team effectiveness as a product of one-sided influence originating with the leader, these researchers posit a reciprocal relationship in which team processes also shape the leader's behavior, roles, and responsibilities.

Despite the fact that Zaccaro, Rittman, and Marks (2001) acknowledge a mutual influence between leaders and their teams, their functional model of team leadership continues to conceptualize leadership as an individual attribute of formal team leaders. Day, Gronn, and Salas (2004) challenge such

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traditional “individual input” models of team leadership, arguing instead for a perspective that views leadership as an outcome of team processes focused on collaborative achievement of common goals. In this output-oriented team leadership framework, Day, Gronn, and Salas acknowledge that team members bring individual leadership abilities and knowledge to the group. What is of primary importance to these researchers, however, is understanding the team-level leadership that results from engaging in shared work. “It is not so much that leadership and team processes become indistinguishable but that leadership happens as an outcome of team processes, and this team-level leadership is then used as a resource in future processes and performance episodes” (p. 859).

The shift from input- to outcome-oriented notions of team leadership holds significant implications for researchers interested in examining effective team strategies. O’Connor and Quinn (2004) assert, “When leadership is viewed as a property of whole systems, as opposed to solely the property of individuals, effectiveness in leadership becomes more a product of those connections or relationships among parts than the result of any one part of that system (such as the leader)” (p. 423). Rather than focusing on the individual attributes and behaviors of team leaders, team leadership research seeks to describe and understand the relationships and processes that foster collective leadership. Of particular interest in this strand of scholarship are the processes and outcomes of team-level learning (Day, Gronn, and Salas, 2004). To effectively address and overcome the complex (adaptive) leadership challenges that characterize contemporary organizations (Heifetz, 1994), teams must increase their leadership capacity by engaging in team-level learning processes that expand the team’s collective adaptability and cognitive complexity. Although research has examined the relationship between team learning and team performance and scholars have identified specific strategies individual leaders can employ to foster team learning (to be accessible, seek input, admit mistakes) (Edmondson, Bohmer, and Pisano, 2001), few researchers have explored the explicit connection between team learning and the emergence of team-level leadership. This gap in the literature will need to be addressed by those interested in advancing the team approach to understanding leadership.



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Leadership in self-managing and virtual teams involves two similar but distinct strands of team leadership research that has also gained prominence in the last fifteen years (Bell and Kozlowski, 2002; Druskat and Wheeler, 2004; Hertel, Geister, and Konradt, 2005; Kayworth and Leidner, 2001/2002; Wageman, 2001). Both strands of scholarship investigate the specific leadership challenges and practices associated with team structures that exhibit greater autonomy and transparency of process as a result of rapid developments in information and communication technologies. Research on the leadership of self-managing teams, those teams with a designated leader (or manager) who is not a regular member of the team, has focused on the identification of effective leadership behaviors that maximize the team's performance (for example, coaching, team design, flexibility, empowerment) (Druskat and Wheeler, 2004; Wageman, 2001). Ironically, external team leaders, not the self-managing team members themselves, continue to be situated at the center of leadership research on self-managing teams.

Research on the leadership of virtual teams, "distributed work teams whose members predominately communicate and coordinate their work via electronic media" (Hertel, Geister, and Konradt, 2005, p. 69) has expanded in recent years in the context of rapid globalization and technological innovation. Rather than conceptualizing virtual teams as fundamentally different from "conventional" work teams, Hertel, Geister, and Konradt (2005) frame "virtuality" as one among many team attributes, with all teams falling somewhere on the virtual spectrum. A review of research on leadership in virtual teams (also called e-leadership) reveals that "virtual team leadership is typically not under the control of any one person, but is expressed through the interplay of team members and technology" (Zigurs, 2003, p. 348). In virtual teams, leadership roles shift among team members depending on the specific objectives and performance tasks occupying that particular moment in the team's life cycle. The challenges of virtual team leadership include overcoming cultural difference, logistical matters such as working in different time zones, technology issues, and limited opportunities for face-to-face interaction (Kayworth and Leidner, 2001/2002; Zigurs, 2003). Additional research findings on virtual team leadership underscore the importance of frequent positive communication, the need to dedicate more



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time to relational development in comparison with “conventional” teams, the benefits of initiating virtual teams with face-to-face interactions, and the importance of mentoring and empathy in virtual teams (Kayworth and Leidner, 2001/2002; Zigurs, 2003).

Minimal research supports relational leadership theory/approach, yet it is built on research from complexity, social/cultural, team, and organizational learning theories. Because it is so new, it may take some time for studies and research support to emerge specifically on the model. Another approach to shared or team leadership is termed *coleadership* or *multileadership* (Alston, 2002). Rather than leading in an established team, coleadership involves a set of leaders working informally but in tandem to provide leadership for an organization such as the principal, assistant principal, chief financial officer, and instructional leader. Little research has been conducted on this model as well.

Research on team leadership has been fairly conclusive. Teams are effective mechanisms for leadership and have many benefits but need to be structured and organized appropriately to reap the benefits (Bensimon and Neumann, 1993; Komives, Lucas, and McMahon, 1998). The references in this book provide ample guidelines to help practitioners build effective teams that will strengthen leadership capacity.

### ***Critique, Problems, and Issues***

Much of the literature from a team or relational perspective is conducted in an idealized way and does not address the challenges of developing a team or relational orientation in hierarchical and bureaucratic structures. Most organizations remain rigid bureaucracies and are limited in their flexibility. We need research that helps guide leaders in these environments to create pockets of collaboration that may eventually help transform the institution. Although leaders can work to transform organizations into ones that support collaboration and teamwork, it can take decades, particularly for large organizations such as colleges and universities. In general, this area of research needs greater exploration to enhance our understanding of how a shared leadership model can work, how empowerment can be fostered, and how leadership can be made more inclusive.

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## *Summary of Team or Relational Leadership*

Leadership is a collective and collaborative process.

One strand of the team leadership research is grounded in a functionalist paradigm and focuses on understanding how to foster leadership in team settings.

A second strand of the team leadership literature is framed by the paradigms of social constructivism and critical theory and views leadership as a relational, collaborative team process. In this framework of team leadership: (1) teams are viewed as cultures in which all members are believed equal and individual differences are affirmed; (2) dialogue among team members with multiple interpretations of the context is encouraged; (3) differences and specific interpretations in team settings are believed to advance cognitive complexity; (4) building relationships is emphasized; (5) relational views of leadership focus on the process of people working together to accomplish change or benefit the common good; and (6) reflection on personal leadership attributes as well as organizational dynamics is believed essential for building inclusive, empowering team environments.

## **Summary**

Leadership research in recent years has taken a dramatic turn. Although bookshelves will continue to hold many titles that read “the eight most important traits for leaders” or “how you can influence people to follow you,” the leadership research has been enriched by a variety of new perspectives. Leadership researchers and practitioners are now beginning to understand the incredible complexity of organizations and global societies where contemporary leadership takes place. The contemporary leadership scholars reviewed in this chapter have also underscored the need for more adaptive, systems-oriented approaches to leadership that enhance cognitive complexity through learning and team leadership. Researchers have called attention to the significance of leaders’ being culturally intelligent and able to understand the perspective of those from different races, cultures, and ethnic backgrounds. Leaders need

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to hone their ability to work in groups and to become more artful at reading organizational and historical contexts. For many practitioners, many of these lessons will not be new because these ideas have been emerging over the last twenty years. But collectively, few practitioners or researchers will have thought about these massive changes in total. The goal of this chapter and this book is to synthesize these collective theoretical and research insights to expand the horizon of our views as both leadership researchers and practitioners.

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